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# OUNDL Chronicle

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In the 1980s, the artist Bernard Kay moved to Oundle, where he lived in one of the oldest houses on North Street. He painted this scene on West Street in 1985. *Private Collection.*

## Councils fail to take action on the scourge of cigarette litter

**Ruby Allenby**

When someone carelessly flicks a cigarette butt into the street, they may not be aware they are committing a crime punishable by a fixed penalty fine of up to £150.

But how much does the local authority really monitor littering? According to the North Northants Council, only three fixed penalties were issued for cigarette littering in the whole of North Northants from January 2022 to September 2023.

The streets of Oundle are strewn

with butts, yet there is no enforcement about the illegal disposal of waste. Hundreds of cigarette butts were found in a stockpile behind the broadband cabinet on New Street. The litter issue was reported to the North Northants Council.

However, the stockpile was later cleaned up by litter picker volunteers, not by the council. New Street is just one area in town illustrating the negative impact of cigarette disposal.

The World Health Organisation

estimates that 4.5 trillion cigarette filters pollute oceans, rivers, city sidewalks, parks, soil and beaches each year. Environment minister Rebecca Pow said, "Cigarette butts are a blight on our communities, littering our streets or ending up washed down the drain and polluting our rivers and oceans."

Tobacco products are amongst the most littered items on the planet, containing a type of plastic in the filters that take thirteen years to break down. According to Keep

Britain Tidy, "Cigarette butts are a unique type of litter - small, smelly, on fire and sadly commonplace on the ground. Even smokers don't like them much." More than seventy percent of streets are affected by smoking litter in the UK, including Oundle, where the 7000 toxins and microplastics contained in the littered butts will leak into the environment, leaving young children and local wildlife at risk of ingesting them.

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# The Chronicle Team



## EDITORIAL TEAM

Lucy Alier  
 Ruby Allenby  
 Roshan Arumugam  
 Orlando Bateman  
 Ava Burton  
 Gussie Coulter  
 Tom Drew  
 Teddy Flanagan  
 Robert Foskett  
 Felix Hwangbo  
 Sophie Lam  
 Arthur Meynell  
 Blue Mitra  
 Iona Morgan  
 Jack Thompson  
 Ella Younie  
 Scarlett Zoll

## STAFF EDITORS

Leigh Giurlando  
 Caitriona O'Brien  
 with thanks to:  
 Annaleena Money and  
 Sue Marsden

Oundle Chronicle  
 Cripps Library  
 Church Street  
 Oundle  
 Peterborough  
 PE8 4EE

oundlechronicle@oundleschool.org.uk

## Cigarette litter

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The stockpile of cigarettes on New Street demonstrates the careless lack of awareness about the harmful effects of cigarette related waste to the local environment.

Litter authorities must have "high regard" to the code of

related litter with an independent task force.

At a bottom-up level, local communities can implement disposal bins for butts, such as the "Ballot Bin". These serve a practical purpose of incentivising proper disposal of cigarette butts. The butt can be inserted into a slotted box in answer to a controversial question



Cigarette litter has routinely been dropped behind the broadband cabinets on New Street.

practice on litter and refuse, which explains how different types of land should be kept clear. The financial cost of cigarette butt littering is high, currently costing local authorities around £40 million per year.

At a top-down level, the government has proposed dealing with cigarette litter in the Environment Bill. In 2021, there was a proposition to make tobacco companies pay for the cost of picking up the litter.

Currently, the government uses policies like Extended Producer Responsibility for packaging and the Deposit Return Scheme to tackle food and drink related litter. Keep Britain Tidy urges the government to use similar initiatives to tackle smoking

such as "Who is the best football player in the world: Ronaldo or Messi?" This leaves the local environment less vulnerable to littering and mitigates the risk of a fixed penalty for the smoker. This has been implemented in councils such as Hackney.

The dire situation of littering has prompted individuals to take action, picking up waste and sometimes reusing the waste in inventive ways.

The Guardian featured Jason Alexander (52) in Suffolk who has picked up 1.2m cigarette butts to date. He creatively stores these butts in a display that resembles the Titanic named the 'Buttanic', tackling a litter problem and highlighting the need for citizens to do more about this issue.

## Bernard Kay

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Bernard Kay studied at the Liverpool School of Art in the 1940s, the Royal Academy School and at ateliers in Paris. In France he travelled throughout the countryside and collected drawings

that would form the basis for his architectural landscape paintings. In his early years in London he focused on large canvases in an abstract expressionist tradition, before returning to landscape paintings. His last exhibition was a retrospective at the Yarrow Gallery. He died aged 94 in May 2021.

## Labour candidate does the rounds in Oundle

### Robert Foskett

Lee Barron, Labour's parliamentary candidate for Corby and East Northamptonshire, recently visited some of Oundle's key community assets including three of the town's schools, the Co-op and Oundle Football Club.

He was selected to fight the next election by local Labour members in April, and will challenge the incumbent Conservative MP, Tom Pursglove. The constituency has previously been held by both major parties and is one which Labour would need to win to gain a majority.

Growing up in Northampton, Lee Barron left school aged 16 to take up an apprenticeship with Royal Mail. He soon became involved in trade unionism and represented postal workers across Northamptonshire for twenty years. He is currently Midlands Regional Secretary for the Trades Union Congress (TUC).

He visited Oundle School, Prince William School and Oundle Primary School. His visit included meetings with all three Head Teachers and a chance to see the cross-sector collaboration that takes place across the partnership.

In November, Lee Barron also visited Oundle Co-op as part of Respect for Shopworkers Week and in support of the Freedom From Fear campaign being run by USDAW, the shopworkers' union.

He said: "The purpose of the week was to support retail workers. It was great talking to local shoppers and workers at the store, and a special shout-out to Oliver, the Co-op store manager."



Photo credit: Ivan Quetglas

The Oundle, Peterborough and East Northants Learning Partnership hosted Lee Barron at three schools in Oundle.

Pictured: Kim Homard-Roy, Deputy Head at PWS; Lee Barron; Carly Waterman, Ambition Institute and formerly Head Teacher in Corby; Gordon Montgomery, Deputy Head Partnerships and Outreach at Oundle School.



# Fresh turnover in town

## Roshan Arumugam

Oundle has seen a number of longstanding businesses close due to retirement over the last year. These premises have been relet to new businesses.

However, the premises of the former banks, Barclays and NatWest, occupy premier locations and remain vacant. Nigel Croskell at Southams Estate Agents said that unrealistic expectations about rent were suppressing the market turnover. He also said the tenants of the bank buildings had left the sites virtually unlettable. "NatWest just ripped out all their fittings and left the building, so it looked like a bomb site. Barclays was a little bit better, but not much," he said. Also, the buildings' substantial size and lack of display windows make it difficult for a retail business to set up shop.

The NatWest building was

that'll bring a bit of employment to the town and also give us more choice as to where to eat," said Chris.

Apart from this, other premises have been let out to a children's toy shop, a beauty shop and Oundle's new travel agent.

Regarding the knitting shop in the Market Place, Chris said: "We've just let the little shop that used to sell knitting wool, but that business hasn't closed down. She's shut temporarily and is relocating to different premises on West Street." Her former shop has now reopened by a new owner selling chocolate.

Online shopping has definitely affected the retail trade, but Nigel felt a place like Oundle can withstand those pressures. "There are a lot of barbers in town, but that's because you can't buy a haircut online. This is why you have coffee shops. You can't get a coffee online.

the lack of national brands. When it was suggested that a fast-food chain might be an option, he was adamantly opposed, citing litter issues among other negatives. "It would just be an absolute crime to bring anything like that to town. Local businesses need supporting, and we got to stop those big boys from coming."

Oundle may be a small market, but Nigel is very positive about the benefits of shopping at independents and doing business here. He said: "It's a relaxed part of the world to come and shop, have a coffee, go to the Talbot or Dexter's and have a drink with lunch. It's a very pleasant way of doing things."

## Market update

In the last year there have been a number of changes in the Market Place. Fiona Swan moved to West Street and has also taken over the shopfront next door, expanding the curtain and blinds business to include upholstery services. Seven Wells Butcher on West Street is now Savvi Travel, a family run independent travel agency. The former Owen and Hartley is now Blue Bamboo, and Oundle Travel on North Street is now Oundle & Stamford Mortgage Services. In 2024, Little Blue will be reopening in Geoff Stubb's former model plane shop; the little shop in the Market Place is now a chocolate shop. West Street also saw two new shops open: the toy shop Bumble and Twig, and Georgina Laura Beauty Therapy. Further down the street, the former offices of Just Lets are being refurbished for a new business. The old post office is scheduled to reopen as a Turkish restaurant. The two former banks, NatWest and Barclay's remain vacant. The owners of the China Town Restaurant are retiring and have put their property on New Street on the market.

## Village pubs close at record rates

### Sophie Lam

The chronicler of British life, Samuel Pepys is reported to have praised pubs as "the heart of England". But gone are the days when there was a pub in every neighbourhood.

On average, more than two pubs a day closed for business in the first half of 2023; in 2022, there were 386 pub closures. The pub industry has

been greatly affected by the pandemic restrictions on socialising, and struggled to recover due to increasing energy bills, increasing cost of supplies and the difficulties in hiring staff. Sites of closed pubs have been demolished or converted to different uses like homes and offices.

Pubs that have recently closed in villages near Oundle include the Chequered Skipper in Ashton, the Shuckburgh Arms in Southwick, the Shuckburgh Arms in Stoke Doyle and the Queen's Head in Bulwick.

The tenants of the Chequered Skipper, who had made substantial investment in the business, attributed its closure to a disagreement with their landlord. They wrote: "We have been unsuccessful with our bid for the takeover of the lease from the previous tenant. That tenant has given notice, and we have no other option than to close the doors." So far, there is no indication that the pub will reopen under new ownership. The Ashton Estate Office did not reply to questions about their plans for the business or the building.

The premises for the Shuckburgh Arms in Southwick is owned by the Southwick Hall estate (the Capron family). After eight years as a community pub run by about thirty members of the Southwick Shuckburgh Arms Community Pub Limited, it was closed in January 2023 after not renewing the lease. The estate agents handling the property did not reply to questions about the building's future.

The last trading day of the Shuckburgh Arms in Stoke Doyle was in June 2023. The pub, with a contemporary and stylish interior, had been a great asset to the village.

The community crowdfunded for them during the pandemic to support them, and in 2023 the owners featured in a C4 TV show and were voted the best value for money after wowing contestants with their converted barn experience.

But despite their efforts, they felt unable to renew the lease. They wrote on their Facebook page: "We've only been here a short amount of time and tried our absolute hardest to make it work, we've battled through Covid, cost of living, thousands of pounds in repairs and we've put our heart and soul into making it work."

The property is currently being marketed for rent as a pub.

The Queen's Head in Bulwick also closed unexpectedly in the summer. After investing in their restaurant, they initially cut back on opening hours due to low demand and higher running costs, but closed permanently in July.



The former NatWest Bank was bought by a property investment company based in London and has been allowed to decay while on the market for a tenant.

bought by Alcomax Investments in 2021 for £225,000, and is being marketed by agents in Birmingham as a retail operation. Nigel said: "There are very few people who can come into Oundle, who need that size building and want to pay that sort of rent. They're talking about £28,100 a year for NatWest. I can't think of anybody who's going to pay that rent."

Estate agent Chris Woodford also emphasised the importance of pitching rent at the appropriate level. "The old NatWest Bank has been available to let for two or three years now, and no one's interested in it because the rent is too high. If you get the rent right, buildings are letting."

Aside from this property, Oundle's turnover has been steady. Locations of "sensible size and sensible rent" are let again quite readily, according to Chris.

"The old post office is going to become a Turkish restaurant. So

This is why you have nail bars," he said.

"The major towns are suffering because of the online shopping problem. Small places like Oundle, to a certain extent, are escaping that because private individuals or small businesses are prepared to come into Oundle and do niche trading that you can't necessarily replicate online."

What distinguishes Oundle's Market Place is this dominance of small independent shops, with just a few national brands as anchors, like Boots and Waitrose.

"If you notice, when you look around, we haven't any of the high street retailers here," Chris said. "The town isn't big enough to support big brands, like clothing shops. So, it's lots of smaller individual businesses. None of the High Street banks are here, anymore. Without the school, it would be a very different place."

Chris is not complaining about



# Opinions remain divided over net zero targets

## Orlando Bateman

The government's shock announcement to delay net zero pledges has divided political opinion about the urgency of environmental versus economic priorities. In June 2019, the UK government legislated a net zero emissions target by 2050. Included in the plan was a ban on the sale of new petrol or diesel cars from 2030. The Prime Minister has now delayed that policy target to 2035.

The delay to net zero has left many in a difficult position, with a few members of the public suggesting that it will affect their voting decisions. Dan, 18, said: "The government's handling of the environmental policy is outrageous. As an active green protester, the implications applied will not help improve the environment, we must look elsewhere to save our climate. I will not vote for this election and if I had to it would be for the green party."

In 2019, the UK saw its largest ever climate change protest with roughly 300,000 people across the UK inspired by activist Greta Thunberg to protest about climate change. Oundle resident Oliver, 17, has been inspired by this movement. "Without a green world there won't be a world at all," he said.

The roll out of electric vehicles plays a role in reaching the 2050

targets. There are currently 920,000 fully electric cars on UK roads, with a growth rate of forty percent from 2021 to 2022. Sunak firmly believes that the UK has already "massively over-delivered" on its carbon targets and suggests that a much "more pragmatic, proportionate and realistic approach" should be taken in order to achieve net zero.

The lack of infrastructure to support EVs, however, might be part of Sunak's "realistic approach". Currently, the nearest charging station to Oundle is eight miles away at the Peterborough A1 services.

Oliver Cruise feels that net zero "is very important and is vital for the success of our society". He was appalled to learn that the nearest charging station is at the Peterborough A1 services.

"It's a disgusting issue and something that needs to be addressed immediately. I look forward to living in a more ecofriendly world."

This year, the Oundle Town Council received a proposal from Believ (previously known as Liberty Charge) with two proposed electric charging locations in Oundle. The company is working closely in collaboration with the North Northants Council to install on-street electric charging points across North Northants. The company has already installed 57

on-street chargers and has plans to install many more around the area.

The plans for the proposed on-street electric chargers are for two charging points serving four parking bays on New Street in front of the Oundle School Cloisters, and two points serving four bays on South Road equipped with 22kW/h connectors. Two of the four parking bays at each location will be reserved for electric vehicles only.

"Electric vehicles provide a low emission solution to driving in the UK," said Believ. "The latest figures indicate that one in five new car sales are for plug-in vehicles and on an upwards trend. Installing on-street charge points in residential areas will allow those without access to off-street parking to make the transition to electric vehicles which would otherwise be difficult."

Kerion, 17, who just passed his driving test, was unconcerned. "I don't drive an electronic vehicle, so to be honest, I don't care."

The installation of the electric vehicle charging infrastructure can be a net gain, attracting tourists and outdoor enthusiasts who drive EVs, promoting tourism and supporting the local economy. It might encourage more people on long journeys to come and visit Oundle.

EV charging infrastructure deployment can stimulate economic activity in rural areas, creating jobs

in installation, maintenance, and operation of charging stations.

The messaging about net zero, however, hasn't fully informed the next generation. Despite the headlines in the media and the push by government towards net zero, young people seem unaware of, or unenthused about, climate change priorities.

Mike, 18, said: "I don't know what the net zero policy and delay is." The same was echoed by Barney, 17, who said: "To be honest, the lack of concern regarding climate change is widespread among the youth."

William, 18, is not convinced by the arguments for net zero, either. He said: "Net zero is a load of rubbish. The effects on the environment that the UK make are extremely minimal. Instead, we should be helping out other countries who contribute far more than we do."

The divisions in opinion are stark. Whether the issue will be a decider in the next election depends on those who do care about it.

Maryam Quayyum passionately believes in the importance of achieving net zero as fast as possible. She said: "Net zero is an important issue, because emissions will kill the earth. The changes are abhorrent and there will be huge implications to the future of the world with the delay."

## Solar farm proposals test commitment to green priorities

### Jack Thompson

The Staunch Campaign is keeping a close eye on a cache of development proposals that affect the countryside around Titchmarsh. The latest plans for the area include two solar farms on arable land.

In 2022 Elgin Energy Esco Ltd submitted a plan to create a solar farm on 154 acres of land owned by the Merchant Venturers at Foxholes Farm situated a mile to the east of Titchmarsh.

In August 2023 a second proposal for solar farm covering 147 acres south of Wood Lodge Farm along the A605 was submitted by Wood Lodge Solar Project Limited.

The Staunch campaign opposes both solar farm developments.

Their opposition is not centred around the principle of building solar farms that would provide a source of renewable energy and contribute to moving the UK towards the government's 2050 net zero target. They said: "STAUNCH fully support renewable energy.

However, it is important that all such schemes should be considered on the basis that they appropriate and proportionate for the environments in which they are intended to be sited."

The campaign questions the suitability of the site proposal. The solar farms would be built on Best and Most Versatile (BMV) rated farmland which is considered the most productive, flexible and efficient land for agriculture. They would prefer development that occurs on brownfield sites, not open and productive farmland.

The Wood Lodge developers are thought by the Staunch group to be bypassing and breaching many planning regulations both at county and national level. The developers do not address these objections, but it is clear that regulations must be abided by for any successful and lawful development.

Other objections relate to social issues. The group argues that greenfield sites like the Wood Lodge Farm should not be

developed regardless of purpose. The land has been used both professionally and recreationally across generations for agriculture and livestock. It serves as a vital green space to interact with nature and possesses a range of mental and physical health benefits for the local community.

The developers believe that the solar farm's benefits outweigh any detrimental effects for some stakeholders. The project promises employment, a renewable energy source, consistent year-round job opportunities, rather than previously seasonal employment. They believe that the overall environmental benefits of the solar farm are crucial in combating the increasing impacts of climate change which threaten the farming industry.

The Wood Lodge solar farm planning statement estimates that the economic benefits of the scheme would "provide an economic output of £1,064,459 GVA over a 14-month period, £194,626 business

rates generated per annum to the council, and significant spin off benefits for the supply chain with gross value added (GVA) in excess of £1 million".

Electricity demand is set to double by 2050 due to the electrification of the UK including widespread use of heat pumps and electric cars. The biggest benefit of solar farms is their role in meeting the National Grid's renewable energy needs.

The solar farm project developers at Wood Lodge Farm estimate that it could serve the total annual energy needs of 15,000 homes, bringing the UK closer to the government's net zero targets.

The Staunch campaign is not alone in their opposition to solar farms being built on greenfield farmland. Between January 2021 and July 2022 twenty-three solar farm planning applications were rejected after opposition by local communities. Staunch want to see the solar developments on more appropriate sites, not on arable land in the Thrapston local area.



## Area military bases on standby

**Gussie Coulter**

On the evening of the 30th of August, a sonic boom could be heard over Oundle and neighbouring villages and towns. "What the heck was that?" exclaimed one alarmed Facebook member of Oundle's community page.

According to a Ryanair spokesperson, "a Boeing 737 briefly lost comms with ATC", prompting a military response in the form of an RAF Quick Reaction Alert (QRA). The response entailed the scrambling of a Eurofighter Typhoon from RAF Coningsby, which reached speeds exceeding 660mph, according to data from Flightradar24.com.

With RAF Coningsby just 70km from Oundle, and several RAF bases even closer by, this event highlighted to many the military significance of the East Midlands. "Thank you, RAF," was one Facebook user's reaction to the sonic boom, in recognition of the haste and efficiency with which the QRA stations acted.

Coningsby is also home to one of the two remaining World War Two era Lancaster bombers, which Oundle residents spotted flying low over their gardens on Battle of Britain Day in September.

With so few flight paths near Oundle and the area's rich UK and US Air Force history, air activity in the local area, whether recreational or military, is all the more interesting. Under increasing global tension and uncertainty, as seen by the war in Ukraine and the conflict in Israel, it is clear that this region plays as key a role as ever in the UK's national security.

There are 145 military sites in the UK, which include 60 controlled by the UK, as well as a further 85 operated by British allies.

The QRA is key to the security of UK airspace. RAF Coningsby is one of just two QRA stations, the other being RAF Lossiemouth, Scotland. According to the RAF website, pilots at QRA stations are "ordered to standby in the cockpits of their Typhoons" to provide quick response should the National Air and Space Operations (NASOC) decide there is sufficient, urgent threat.

Historically, there was significant American and British air force presence in the region around Oundle. Throughout much of the Cold War, up until 1969, two nuclear armed aircraft were stationed on 15 minutes readiness from takeoff from RAF Wittering, just outside Stamford.

RAF Molesworth, one of ten

US air force bases in the UK, lies just 12km south of Oundle. Since activation in 2005, RAF Molesworth has been home to multiple units of the United States' 423rd Air Base Group. According to its website, the 423rd Air Base Group "delivers unrivalled services to support combat capability". The Group often performs military drills and exercises at Molesworth.

The Joint Intelligence Operations Centre Europe Analytic Centre (JAC) is located at Molesworth. Its area of responsibility encompasses over 50 European nations alongside the Middle East, sub-Saharan and Western Africa, clearly highlighting the neighbouring areas' significance for international strategy and planning.

RAF Wittering, though lying dormant from 2010 to 2014, currently provides elementary flying training for new RAF pilots. It has a rich history and, according to RAF Wittering's website, "has played a significant role in almost every major conflict for the last 100 years".

Alongside providing training, during the First World War, Wittering served as a prisoner of war camp, and during the Second World War, it dispatched planes to fight in the Battle of Britain. During the post-war period V-bombers from Wittering participated in operation GRAPPLE, an early series of British nuclear weapon tests. By the 1960s, all three V-Force bombers operated at Wittering: the Valiant, Victor and the Vulcan.

Known as "The Home of the Harriers", RAF Wittering was the first RAF base to receive the Hawker Sidney Harrier – the first operational Harrier jump jet series. From 1969, up until their retirement in 2010, Wittering housed the Harriers. These jets were used in most major British conflicts including the Falklands War, the Second Gulf War, and the war in Afghanistan.

Kings Cliffe airfield was constructed for use in the Second World War in 1940. It was used by multiple RAF and USAAF units throughout the war. Whilst retired in 1959 and sold back for agriculture, there is a memorial between Kings Cliffe and Wansford commemorating "the eternal memory of American, British, Belgian and Commonwealth airmen who gave their lives in the cause of freedom". The memorial, framed by two stone sculptures of USAAF and RAF fighter wings, serves as an abiding reminder of the vital national security and defense role played by our region.

## A sky full of stars...or satellites

**Tom Drew**

When Oundle residents spotted an extensive line of mysterious lights flying across the sky in November, there was understandable concern. On Facebook, the discussion began with slight alarm: "Anyone seen the long line of planes that appear to be flying over Oundle?" Although it was fair to think that aliens were sending morse code signals to us, the lights were in fact, Starlink satellites. "Yes - I was worried," a resident admitted.



Photo credit: Georgia Harris

The train of unknown white lights in the sky was an unsettling sight.

These satellites were launched by Elon Musk's spacecraft manufacturing company SpaceX. Musk has launched over 4,500 satellites since the first launch in May 2019. Due to the satellites' close orbit to Earth and the clear night skies of Oundle, it is quite easy to spot the satellites on visible evenings if they are above us. SpaceX aims to achieve global mobile phone service after 2023.

Starlink satellites were developed by Musk to provide low-cost internet access to remote locations. This is beneficial for

terrains like deserts and mountains, where internet connection can be made without building enormous amounts of infrastructure.

The Starlink satellites have also proven to be helpful in the Russia-Ukraine war, with Ukrainian military and civilians depending on the Starlink satellites to contact the outside world after bombing campaigns have destroyed the country's infrastructure. They have even been used by President Zelensky to broadcast to the world. The fact that the internet used by the Ukrainians does not rely on cables means that a soldier can receive a signal no matter where they are on the battlefield. It also means that the Russians are not able to intercept the communication.

Musk's problem with the Starlink satellites is that most of us are already connected to the internet without having to pay SpaceX's £89 per month and the £529 satellite dish installation fee.

So far, Musk is providing his services to a small market. SpaceX did manage to turn a profit for the first quarter of 2023, but it projected it would have 20 million subscribers by the end of 2022. Instead, by May 2023, the company reported it had about 1.5 million users. Despite Ukraine's need for Musk's satellites, he may have overestimated the necessity for Starlinks.

Starlinks remain a curious phenomenon in the sky, but SpaceX has admitted that they need to find a way to make the satellites appear less bright. Astronomers fear that the bright train of orbiting objects will interfere with observations of the universe. Due to the sheer size and number of Starlinks in space, they are now said by experts to be the number one source of collision hazards in Earth's orbit.



Santa and his sleigh were spotted airborne above the Yarn Bomb Christmas display in the Market Place.



# Police Beat

**Sophie Lam**

On 23 October 2022, Fred Holmes, 60, was spotted in Warmington with his three dogs, which went on to chase and kill a hare. He was challenged by a witness, who later reported Holmes to Northamptonshire Police. Holmes was charged with two counts of trespass in pursuit of game and two counts of being equipped to trespass in pursuit of hares, which he entered guilty on all four counts at Boston Magistrates' Court on 10 November. Holmes was ordered to pay £16,783.50 for the kennel costs, as well as fines for the two trespass offences and victim surcharges, making a total fine of £18,577.50. Holmes was also banned from keeping dogs for ten years. The three dogs were rehomed.

On Tuesday, 13 June, Stihl garden machinery was stolen from a van on Benefield Road near Clifton Drive.

On Friday, 16 June, at about 9pm, an incident occurred at the Recreation Ground on New Road, resulting in the loss of an iPhone. Offenders were caught by police and identified, but lack of evidence led to no charges.

On Tuesday, 20 June, a distraction burglary occurred on New Road. The victim was approached by an individual, and after they had left, the victim realised that both personal and work-related items were missing from his work van.

On Monday, 31 July, there was

an overnight theft from a van in Walcott Close. There was unknown entry to the van, and electric tools and other items were stolen.

Two men wearing balaclavas drove off at speed after breaking into a resident's garage in Oundle. The victim said the suspects got into a blue car which sped towards the Red Kite Drive estate, before exiting onto South Road at around 7.40pm on Tuesday, 19 September.

Between 11pm on Thursday, 5 October and 7.30am on Friday, 6 October, criminal damage/theft was conducted on South Road, where unknown instruments were used to smash the quarter light window on the passenger side of the vehicle. Tools were taken from the rear of the vehicle.

On Friday, 6 October, criminal damage/theft was conducted on Clifton Drive at about 9.30pm. Damage has been caused to the IP's vehicle and items were stolen.

In October, a house on St Peter's Road was shut down by police after concerns over suspected drug dealing and persistent anti-social behaviour.

Between 27 October and 10 November, a door frame was bent at a property on St Peter's Road in a failed burglary attempt.

Between 31 October and 5 November, two to three young people travelling in an old-style Land Rover were seen taking large, carved and uncarved pumpkins from multiple residents' front gardens.

Between 3.30pm on Friday, 3 November and 9.45am on Saturday, 4 November, the front number plate of a car parked in Mason Close was stolen.

In August 2023, forty people were caught speeding on the A605 in Barnwell and Thrapston. One person was caught not wearing a seatbelt. This was over 2 hours and 45 minutes of monitoring. There was no monitoring of the A427 near Upper Benefield.

In September 2023, one hundred and eighteen people were caught speeding on the A605 in Barnwell and Thrapston. One person was caught not wearing a seatbelt and another exceeded 90mph on a 60mph road, resulting in prosecution. This was over 7 hours and 30 minutes of monitoring. Eight people were caught speeding on the A427 near Upper Benefield during 1 hour and 30 minutes of monitoring.

For reference, the recorded data represents a small fraction of the time spent by drivers on the road. The actual statistics for the whole month, however, may be roughly proportional to those presented here.

## Speeding offences

**Gussie Coulter**

There remain no speed cameras on Northamptonshire roads, but the police frequently use mobile vans to identify, and act upon offences on the roads. They release their statistics for each month in Freedom of Information requests.

In June 2023, eighty-nine people were caught speeding on the A605 in Barnwell and Thrapston. This was over 4 hours of police monitoring. Nine people were caught speeding on the A427 near Upper Benefield during 1 hour and 25 minutes of police monitoring.

In July 2023, seven people were caught speeding on the A605 in Barnwell. This was over 1 hour and 55 minutes of monitoring. There is no data for near Thrapston. Eight people were caught speeding on the A427 near Upper Benefield during 1 hour and 40 minutes of monitoring.

## Oundle Bikeways outlines new planned cycling network across town

**Gussie Coulter**

With the government's focus on net-zero and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, the popularity of cycling has soared. Over forty-two percent of British people own a bike, and since 2019 there has been a twenty-six percent rise in cycling trips.



Transition Oundle, in tandem with Oundle Town Council have revived a cycling initiative under the new name Oundle Bikeways. Originating from a 2012 cycling event, 'On Yer Bike', Transition Oundle has been working on this project for over ten years.



Oundle Bikeways has outlined three cycle routes connecting key residential and community hubs in town.

They produced a survey report in 2014 that identified the importance of improved cycle access around town. This was followed by a Northants Cycle plan conducted by Sustrans in 2015 that outlined cycle routes.

In 2019, £130,000 was made available from Section 106 funds for use on cycle ways. Their continued aim has been to work towards a sustainable future by implementing more cycle paths in Oundle.

Alongside the environmental incentives, Transition Oundle has identified three key stakeholders: parents with young children; cautious adults returning to cycling; and mobility scooter users. With these three groups in mind, it seeks to provide a safer opportunity to

cycle round Oundle.

Once fully implemented, the Oundle Bikeways scheme will make a difference for all residents by "encouraging healthier lifestyles, reducing local transport emissions, relieving congestion at peak times, and helping to ease parking issues".

The Oundle Bikeways project is comprised of three main cycle routes.

Bikeway 1 will connect Creed Road and Wentworth Drive with the Oundle Primary School. Most of the work remains to be completed on Cotterstock Road.

Bikeway 2 will connect Benefield Road with the centre of town and Glapthorn Road. This is yet to be begun.

Bikeway 3 will start on St Peter's Road and will terminate on Station Road via Occupation Road and New Road.

Funding, route confirmation, and adaptation are still in the

works for both Bikeway 2 and 3, but work for the final stretch of Bikeway 1 will begin soon.

David Wood, who has worked on the cycling project for over 10 years is retiring. He encourages volunteers to get involved with developing open spaces and cycle routes. He said: "Given the increased focus on climate change, a cycle network remains a priority."

To help out and volunteer for the Oundle Bikeways project, communicate with Transition Oundle via email at: [info@transitionoundle.org.uk](mailto:info@transitionoundle.org.uk).

They would like to hear from people who can improve signage, plan fundraising, set up training for children, and help encourage others to cycle more.



# A new concept in housing proposed by TOWN for Millers' Field

Lucy Alikar

A new sustainable housing development is being planned for Millers' Field off Benefield Road. TOWN and Mole Architects aim to create fourteen sustainable, low-energy homes, with green areas for biodiversity and leisure usage.

Millers' Field, a ten-minute walk from the town centre, is named after Robert Miller, the father of the current owners. The Millers have said they want Millers' Field to leave "a positive legacy for the local community". TOWN and Mole Architects have been specifically chosen to align with these beliefs. TOWN is a "profit-with-purpose developer" that focuses on social and environmental sustainability.



Concept sketch of the centre of Millers' Field. Illustrated proposal by TOWN.

"We deliver homes, streets and neighbourhoods that improve people's quality of life, enable more sustainable ways of living and improve the wider places they are part of." Mole Architects echo these values, prioritising "beauty, sustainability and community".

Millers' Field is on track to be Oundle's first "group custom build community", with green spaces and existing allotments protected from development, as well as net-zero carbon in operation and low carbon construction to a Passivhaus standard.

The "custom build" aspect of the development involves signed-up members of the Millers' Field building group in the process of planning and construction, two-thirds of whom currently live less than five miles from Oundle. TOWN says "the emerging scheme has been designed, and will continue to be refined, in close collaboration with future residents."

Millers' Field is focused on homes for elderly living, with an accessible site and housing types suitable for older people, which

will help free up family housing in Oundle.

They aim to begin construction in the spring of 2025.

The idea of a custom build design involving the home-buyers is a form of housing development that has become increasingly popular in the UK and Europe. These self-build community housing plans really began with the Dutch city of Almere, which was a pioneer for sustainable city planning, with the Dutch government encouraging people

to build their own homes as a community. There are currently 20 built cohousing projects in the UK. An example of this is the cohousing community in Marmalade Lane, Cambridge, which was developed by TOWN and Mole Architects.

This cohousing community, which involves shared facilities and green spaces, aims to increase community spirit and sustainability, meeting the needs of the present without interfering with the ability of future generations to meet their needs.



Overhead view of Millers' Field. Illustrated proposal by TOWN.

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## Retirement living complex proposed for Herne Road

**Sophie Lam**

Development plans have been submitted by McCarthy Stone proposing a retirement living complex at Herne Road. The complex would replace a bungalow on the plot and extend into a field at the rear, bordering Red Kite Drive. The population in North Northamptonshire of people aged over 65 has increased by thirty percent between 2011 and 2021.

McCarthy Stone said that the North Northamptonshire Council's Joint Core Strategy has recognised the need to meet the housing requirements of its growing ageing population. The development would help to address this issue, allowing local older people in Oundle the opportunity to downsize into a more suitable home.

The proposed development includes 43 accommodation units, comprising 42 apartments and one bungalow. There will be 19 one-bedroom and 23 two-bedroom apartments, with three-quarters of them having private balcony areas and gardens. Along with the apartments, there will also be a communal garden for recreational use, a residents' lounge and a total of 32 car parking spaces.

Objections have been raised by neighbourhood residents including objections to the balconies that would overlook nearby properties,

and questions raised about access to adjacent fields under private ownership.

One big concern is traffic, particularly with Prince William School also located on Herne Road. "Parents park all along Herne Road to collect, which causes visibility and access issues to residents and occasional gridlock when there is inconsiderate parking."

It was felt that the development will make the road even more dangerous at the beginning and end of the school day. "The traffic of the 43 new accommodation units will add to the already heavy load on South Road and the town centre where parking spaces are in short supply."

McCarthy Stone has a track record of building good quality developments, and the proposal received support from older residents. "As a couple in our 80s who have lived in Oundle for over 20 years, we support this application wholeheartedly."

McCarthy Stone has said its proposals would help to meet the housing requirements of the county's growing ageing population, allowing local older people in Oundle the opportunity to downsize into a more suitable home.

The NNC planning committee date for discussing the plans has not yet been decided.



Illustration by McCarthy Stone

McCarthy Stone has submitted plans for a mix of 42 one and two-bedroom retirement living apartments, set within landscaped gardens, with a residents lounge and on-site car parking.

## Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner under continued scrutiny

**Robert Foskett**

Northamptonshire's elected Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner, Stephen Mold (Conservative) has faced calls for his resignation after appointing a close friend with no operational experience as interim Chief Fire Officer. This came after Mark Jones, the controversial previous CFO, departed suddenly from the role on 7th July 2023 as part of a confidential settlement agreement.

Nicci Marzec, who was serving as Monitoring Officer and Head of Paid Staff in the Commissioner's office, was asked to carry out the role of CFO on an interim basis whilst a permanent appointee was found. Her appointment was announced on July 7.

Her appointment prompted a backlash amid suggestions that she and Stephen Mold were in a relationship, which both have denied. Mold has, however, admitted that they go to the same gym and he has stayed overnight at her house. Questions have also been asked as to why Marzec appears regularly to have worked from Mold's private business premises.

Prior to the appointment of a new CFO, the Commissioner is required to call a meeting of the Police, Fire and Crime Panel, made up of a group of councillors from across the county as well as two co-opted members of the public. At the confirmation hearing, the Panel interviews the candidate and decides whether to recommend the appointment.

The Commissioner did not, however, call a confirmation hearing for Marzec as he claims that he did not believe this was required for an interim appointment. This legal view is disputed by a barrister instructed by West Northamptonshire Council. It later transpired that the Commissioner's legal advice on this matter was requested and received by Marzec in her role as Monitoring Officer in his office.

After ten days as interim CFO, Marzec resigned from this position as well as all her other roles within the office for the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner.

At a special meeting of the Police, Fire and Crime Panel, the Commissioner said: "In hindsight I wish I'd followed a different course and involved the panel. I would make the same appointment again, but I would follow a different process. It was less than transparent. It wasn't my intention. My strong wish was that I had involved the panel."

The panel decided against voting no confidence in Mold, who is seeking re-election in May 2024, however one councillor suggested that he needed to "go back to school". Twenty-seven Conservative councillors from across Northamptonshire signed a letter in September calling on the Conservative Area Committee "to use whatever mechanisms and powers that are available to them, to re-evaluate the adoption of Mr Stephen Mold as the Conservative candidate for police, fire, and crime commissioner for Northamptonshire" and "to restart the process of candidate selection and to welcome applicants for this position that is up for election in May 2024." This was not intended to be an open letter, however it was leaked.

The letter also says: "It is apparent to us, that this issue will overshadow any forthcoming election campaign, and feel it will all but guarantee a Labour victory."

The Commissioner has now announced his preferred candidate to be the permanent CFO, a former police officer with no previous experience of working in fire services. Nikki Watson recently retired from the position of Deputy Chief Constable of Avon and Somerset Police.

This has prompted a similar backlash. Adam Taylor, the East Midlands representative on the Executive Council of the Fire Brigades' Union, said: "Once again, PFCC Stephen Mold appears intent on appointing a chief fire officer who doesn't have the necessary experience. We need our chief fire officer to have practical experience of keeping firefighters and the public safe when responding to fires, floods and other callouts. It's clear that this chaos will continue until we can take the power out of the hands of one unaccountable individual and give it back to a democratic fire authority."

Matt Wrack, General Secretary of the Fire Brigades' Union also said: "Stephen Mold is trying to take the fire service back one hundred years to the failed model of police fire brigades. Every decision he takes seems to further confirm his lack of competence to oversee the fire and rescue service. His insistence on promoting unqualified senior managers is untenable and endangers public safety."

Nikki Watson said: "Throughout my career I have worked hard to make a difference to people and communities, and I am committed to doing my best for Northamptonshire Fire and Rescue Service and for the county as a whole."



## Charity shops are destinations for fashion and vintage hunters

**Iona Morgan**

Charity shops can be found all over the UK and have a long history here. They were founded to serve a two-fold purpose – raising money for important causes and providing a source of affordable clothing. There are currently over 11,000 shops in the UK, raising approximately £270 million a year to support funding for vital services such as medical research and tackling poverty.

didn't have a lot of money and I felt great satisfaction when I found something I liked. My favourite sort of shop is one where you have to rifle through a random assortment of things because that really fuels my sense of satisfaction. That's where I have found the really fun, quirky things."

Oundle is lucky to have two quality charity shops. The Air Ambulance Charity Shop and Oxfam have a huge range of items

trends rise and fall, and notes the increase in popularity for vintage shopping. He said: "In my day you would get the coolest things from the charity shop on the road, but then the popularity dipped, and no one wanted to buy anything. Now people are starting to see the value of shops like us again. There is a big focus on sustainability these days which is good. It's something I care about personally. Young people seem to like online sites like Vinted, meaning people do lots of second-hand shopping. I just want people to do that in charity shops."

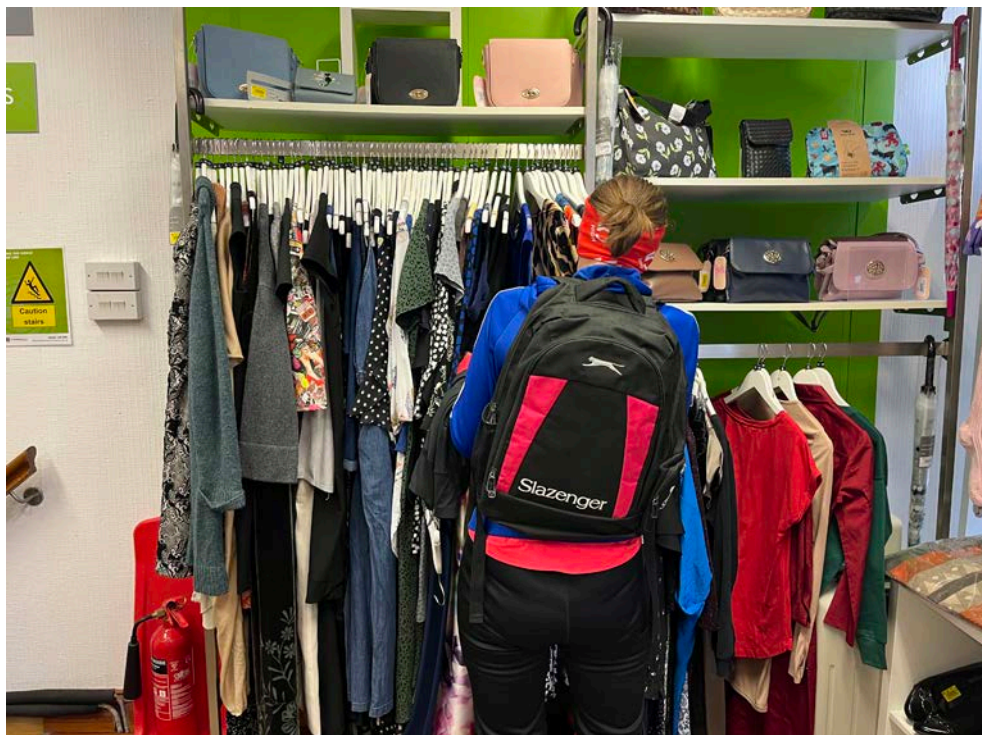
A very strict process is used to sort all donations, making sure they are of the right quality to sell on. Huge amounts of clothes and books are sifted through in quality checks. Of course, not everything can be sold, but whatever is rejected, is recycled.

Despite the growing popularity, there are still preconceptions surrounding buying from charity shops, which are difficult to overcome.

Jamie said: "When people talk about charity shops or hear about them, they either turn their noses up or think everything in there will be a bit naff. That perception is hard to shake."

Nevertheless, according to GlobalData, the clothes resale market in the UK grew by 149% between 2016 and 2022. It is forecast to rise by 67.5% from 2022 to 2026. This huge rise is caused by many factors, one of which is the increased awareness of sustainability and its impact on the planet.

Whether a seasoned second hand shopper or just starting out, having two charity shops in Oundle provides plenty of opportunities for discovery. For those who are looking to start charity shopping, Eleanor has one key tip: "When walking into a charity shop, keep an open mind. You never know what you will find!"



The Air Ambulance Charity Shop has two floors of clothes and household items for bargain hunters and vintage enthusiasts.

The role of charity shops has developed over time and these days, fashion-forward shoppers go to charity shops looking for vintage bargains. Those who are sustainability-minded shop there to combat throw-away culture. For both of these groups, charity shops have an evident appeal; there's a feeling of satisfaction in looking for clothes in charity shops.

Eleanor Talbot shops regularly at charity shops and emphasised the pleasure that is often found in second hand shopping. She said "I made the decision to start shopping at charity shops when I was a teenager, largely because I

to pick through. Clothes, books, toys, shoes and jewellery are just some of the items donated - there is something for everyone.

While the growing popularity of charity shops does centre around clothing, the variety of items sold should not go unnoticed. Eleanor said: "I think people would be pleasantly surprised by the crockery and glassware, because the charity shops in Oundle often have such a range of things. Often people only focus on the clothes, but I have found amazing plates and glasses there as well."

Jamie, the manager of the Air Ambulance Charity Shop has seen

## Oundle delegate represents Corby constituency at Labour Party Annual Conference

**Robert Foskett**

October saw around 20,000 people descend on Liverpool for the largest ever Labour Party Annual Conference, a highlight in the political calendar.

I was very kindly given permission to miss a few days of school so that I could attend as a delegate representing local party members in our constituency, Corby and East Northamptonshire.

Delegates are elected by their Constituency Labour Party (CLP) to vote on behalf of local members, and they are eligible to be called to speak. They are also guaranteed a seat to watch the major speeches, such as the Leader's Speech.

This year's Conference was particularly interesting as it was most likely the last Conference before the general election and, we hope, before a Labour government.

We heard a number of new policy announcements, including a pledge to invest £1.5 million in improving NHS capacity. It was particularly moving to hear a speech from somebody terminally ill with bowel cancer about how diagnosis can be improved to ensure that cancer is identified and treated faster to save lives.

A particular highlight of mine was being involved in compiling a motion on Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) which was debated and agreed by the Conference. Our CLP submitted a motion seeking to tie up a legal loophole following the tragic rape and murder of Collette Gallacher, a six-year-old girl from Corby, in 1986.

Motions submitted by CLPs are assigned to a topic area and there is a ballot to choose which of these topic areas will be debated. VAWG was successful in the ballot and, as a delegate from a CLP which submitted a motion on this, I was invited to a composite meeting to bring the motions together into one agreed text.

Lee Barron, our local Parliamentary candidate, was called on to speak in favour of a motion on Labour's New Deal for Working People.

This is a plan which will be passed within one hundred days of a Labour government taking office, giving workers new rights, including full employment rights from day one and a ban on zero hours contracts, and fire and rehire.

## Recycle Christmas trees with Sue Ryder

National healthcare charity Sue Ryder is encouraging residents to sign up to their Christmas Treecycle scheme and help raise vital funds for patients needing palliative and bereavement care.

For a suggested donation, the charity will collect real Christmas trees direct from people's front door, front garden or driveway, and recycle them.

As part of Treecycle, residents



who live in Oundle can have their trees collected between Saturday 6 January and Tuesday 9 January 2024.

Real Christmas trees are 100% recyclable and can be turned into compost or wood chippings that

can be spread over parks, gardens and landscaping. Those who choose to participate in Treecycle will not only be supporting Sue Ryder, but will also be helping reduce landfill.

The deadline to book a tree collection is midnight on 1 January. To book online visit their website: [sueryder.org/peterboroughtrees](http://sueryder.org/peterboroughtrees).

The environmentally friendly fundraising collection drive is supported by Nene Valley Tree Services and Safe Local Trades.

Contact the fundraising team at Sue Ryder Thorpe Hall Hospice with any queries on 01733 225 999 or email: [thorpe.fundraising@sueryder.org](mailto:thorpe.fundraising@sueryder.org)



## At Tansor Playgroup exploration and play are at the centre of learning

### Lucy Alier

Tansor Playgroup has been providing early years care for over 40 years, and is possibly one of the oldest childcare providers near Oundle. Led by Michelle Tilley, the team of trained and experienced early years practitioners provides a nurturing, friendly, educational playgroup, located in the Tansor Village Hall, previously the village school.

The benefits of not-for-profit playgroups are numerous, including promoting social and communication skills, as well as literacy and numeracy, all things that Tansor Playgroup support.

They also have relationships with local primary schools to assist with a smooth transition into Reception.

The playgroup follows the early years curriculum and provides an environment for social interaction in which children can play and learn, assisting language development and communication. It's supported by formal assessments at key points and termly parents' consultations.

Michelle said, "Our curriculum is set to inspire children and follow their interests. The children are learning all the time through play."

Photo: Tansor Playgroup



The children at Tansor Playgroup arrive with wellies to enjoy the outdoor opportunities in the garden and at their dedicated woodland classroom.

The village hall is spacious and well equipped with play areas for focused activities.

Outside, the opportunities are vast, with the playgroup emphasising outdoor play and exploration. "Most of our children arrive wearing wellies to start the day," said Michelle.

To the front is a tarmac area for bikes, trikes and scooters. "Children usually play on these the minute they arrive. We are always amazed how quickly our children learn to manage a balance bike. The space to practice at playgroup is great for this," explained Michelle.

To the back of the hall is a lawn,

vegetable patch and mature trees, providing further play space for a swing set, climbing frame, pirate ship and a fun house on legs.

An exciting new piece of equipment has also been acquired. "We have also just purchased a fabulous new mud kitchen, which is currently used by children who have been inspired to make witch's potions!" said Michelle.

What distinguishes Tansor Playgroup is its dedicated woodland classroom site for the children who are three years old and over, hosted by the Wildlife Trust at Glapthorn Cow Pasture Nature Reserve. Here, they run three-hour forest school sessions once a week from Easter until the October Half Term.

The staff at the playground value the support and help of any parents who wish to be involved.

Michelle said: "Some of the parents who feel they have some spare time to offer, join our playgroup committee to help raise funds, write policies, and keep our accounts in order."

Tansor Playgroup is open during term time from 9am to 3pm for full or half day sessions. Places are eligible for funding from universal and government entitlements.

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## You're Crackers if you walk by Oundle's best loved and longest running shop under one owner

**Lucy Alier**

To people walking past on the street, Crackers is best known for the creativity of its elaborately crafted displays and painted window glass. The Christmas window display is as highly anticipated as anything in Piccadilly.

Since then, the shop's stock has developed and changed with trends and fashions. Judy said: "The stock does evolve, you have to keep changing. But you stay true to what you believe in and what you want. It's fun to keep up with things."

One of these beliefs is the value



The window display at Crackers is "very important, indeed," said Judy.

But to regular visitors, the shop is best known for its owner Judy.

The shop opened 35 years ago selling country clothing. But it was difficult to move the stock, so the business evolved into a gift shop, and a shop with gifts needed a new name. Judy Hibbins said the decision was not made with any intent to market themselves.

"Everyone thinks we are called Crackers because of opening Christmas crackers with lovely things, but it wasn't. It was my husband, Roger. I said we've got to change the name. And he said, 'It's quite simple, we'll call it Crackers because we're Crackers for staying here!' So that's how it became Crackers."

of sustainability and ethically sourced products. "You have to be aware of sustainability and ethos when you buy. And packaging." She tries to buy as much as she can from British firms, pointing to candles made in Cornwall and Lough, and chinaware from Peregrine Pottery in Stoke-on-Trent.

"Some bits do come from other countries as well: a lot comes from India, but it's all traceable and sourced. That's the Fairtrade umbrella," said Judy.

Crackers has had a varied and expanding stock of giftware since its opening. Her shelves are packed with brightly woven scarves, bags and gloves and a table centrepiece is decked with jewellery. But one

constant is the popular Jelly Cats soft toys, which Judy has sold for over 20 years now. "Jelly Cats, of course, are just massive."

For new customers and the many loyal, returning customers alike, Judy just aims to make them happy when they visit her shop: "My feeling with our shop is I want everyone to feel happy. We often

week! It is like a second home to me, with the homey and welcoming feeling."

Similarly, Madeleine, 12, said: "I really enjoy visiting Crackers with my friends on a Saturday afternoon. The shop is so warm, friendly and cosy. Judy is such a kind, caring person, always asking us about ourselves and how we



The staff at Crackers have worked with Judy for decades. Sarah has been at the shop for 23 years (they think), and Elaine for 9 years.

have children come in with two pounds, five pounds and we can go round and choose presents for their parents or friends."

Among the many devoted customers are girls who visit the shop every Saturday afternoon. Maxine, 12, said, "I love all the cute trinkets and charming gifts and my favourite part, the stately collection of Jelly Cats, which is still growing!"

Their visits are not just to buy gifts, but also to spend time with Judy, with whom the girls have developed a close relationship. Mint, 12, said, "Going to Crackers is the highlight of my week. Judy is always glad to talk to us about our

are, and checking that we are ok, as well as what we have done during the week. My friends and I have made a really strong bond with her. We love supporting her by buying things like necklaces, earrings and occasionally some chocolate!"

Judy has enormous affection not only for her customers, but also her team of longstanding staff.

"I'm lucky to have such brilliant staff; Sarah's worked for me for 23 years now, I think. We lose count! And such loyal customers. It keeps us going and we love seeing everyone grow up and go off. I think we're near enough into Crackers grandchildren, really."

## A shopfront fit for a royal setting

**Tom Drew**

In September 2022, scenes for the final season of *The Crown* were shot in Oundle.

*The Crown's* location manager shortlisted Oundle because it was close to London and its stonework looked like it could pass for a town in Scotland. After considering the different shopfronts in town, the then premises of Owen and Hartley were chosen for the scene.

It is known that the writers of *The Crown* took many liberties with historical fact to shape their fictional narrative. For Oundle residents, the most obvious fiction was when a local street was

transported to Scotland. The studio is the shop and home of fictional Scottish photographer Duncan Muir, based in Ballater near Balmoral.

Professional carpenters entered the location for the shoot a week prior to the cast and crew, arriving to paint the interior and exterior of the building to recreate a 1990s era photography studio downstairs and a flat with a kitchen upstairs. Every detail was considered from framed paintings, disorganised desk surfaces to biscuit crumbs scattered across the kitchen countertop.

Finally, a week after the



Blue Bamboo at the top of North Street was the location for a Scottish photography studio in *The Crown*.

carpenters prepared the building for filming, on top of 150 cars there was a barrage of 45-foot-long vehicles for costume, make-up, catering and production. Barnwell Country Park and Oundle Town

Football Club hosted the enormous number of vehicles and provided a venue for catering, while St Peter's Church served as a centre for the supporting cast.

After all the money, time and effort taken to produce the shots of Oundle, the total run-time added up to make three minutes of footage across three different scenes.

The average season of *The Crown* costs around £100 million to make. Now Oundle viewers know why. If this seems like an excessive amount of effort to produce three minutes of footage, imagine how much the big budget scenes cost.

Oundle-upon-Ballater can be glimpsed in season 6, episode 2 of *The Crown*, streaming on Netflix.



## Documentaries come into the mainstream at DOCS+

### Blue Mitra

Oundle does not have a multiplex cinema, but it does have DOCS+ Cinema, a long-running programme of public screenings of documentaries. Run by a small committee of volunteers, it began at least twenty years ago.

Agris Krumins was a founding organiser. "I really thought that there was a dearth of films about what was happening in the world, and there was nobody showing them around here. You had to travel far to see them. I was very interested and thought, let's do it for the community. And so, we decided that as part of the local Oundle Cinema at that time, we would have a division with documentaries. That's how we started."

Another organiser is Ted Sullivan, who brings his experience in journalism to the programme selection. He feels that documentaries have become more mainstream. "Documentaries have become a much bigger thing than they used to be. They used to be

a sort of a slightly fuddy duddy thing, but I think now they have broadened their appeal," he said.

Hit documentaries on streaming platforms about celebrities such as Taylor Swift, Prince Harry and David Beckham are examples of how the format has become more accessible to general audiences.



In November, DOCS+ screened *Foragers*, a film about foraging for wild edible plants in Palestine/Israel.

The DOCS+ programme has shown a range of films that vary from the Amy Winehouse documentary to one on the deposits of nuclear materials in the deep mines of Finland.

They aim to make the evenings a full experience, bringing in a range of speakers to discuss the issues and lead conversations about the films. Cambridge history professor, Max Scherer came to speak after a Richard III biopic. He had been on the team at Leicester University that had dealt with the remains discovered under a car park. On December 13th, filmmakers from Corby will come to discuss their documentary about the classical guitarist, Julian Bream.

Other documentaries focus on news and events such as a recent documentary about foraging for wild plants in Palestinian territories. A documentary called 20 days in Mariupol, about the Russian occupation of the Ukraine city of Mariupol included Ukrainian cakes and music, and was followed by a talk with Russian expert Keir Giles from Chatham House and Yuliia Cherniavska, recently returned from her home near Mariupol.

The group believes that documentaries are particularly

powerful because "they hit a raw nerve". But it is important to them that the programme is neutral about coverage of events and issues. Which does not mean that they seek to avoid controversy. Agris said: "I have no problem with showing biased films. We're not here to have a rounded view or BBC view of the world. It's not like that."

Agris is keen that people come along and share their opinion and discuss things. He said: "We have no political bias. Whatever your ideas, you can talk about them. I think it's really important that there are spaces where you can actually discuss things openly in a public arena, rather than just posting on Facebook or Instagram or whatever."

The films are screened once a month, every second Wednesday of the month, apart from when they have a special event. An ecommerce website is in development, so right now people just pay at the venue door, usually at Fletton House.

Details on their forthcoming programme of films is available on their Facebook page: Oundle Docs+ Cinema.

## Refugees settle into new lives

### Iona Morgan

When Ukrainian refugees started arriving to the area in 2022 under the government sponsorship scheme, the Oundle community responded swiftly to support them. Led by the Oundle Baptist Church, a weekly support group was established. Quickly outgrowing the space at No. 1, they moved to Fletton House, where over 50 refugees and their hosts could come together once a week to forge relationships and connections to help the refugees settle into new lives in the UK.

Sixteen months later, with new routines and jobs established, the group felt that they no longer needed the weekly support meetings. Instead, there are WhatsApp groups for support and advice. Most importantly, the friendships and community that was forged and reinforced through this group is continuous.

Two of the driving forces behind the group, Carolyn Gent and Janet Croxon are pleased to note how much has changed for a community of people who had to abandon everything they had and knew, and start again.

Refugees who arrived in the first months of the war were offered accommodation by hosts that was supported by the government. Many of them have now moved on from their host families and have found work. With English

language tuition, their level of English has developed significantly, and the translator who was used by the support group is no longer needed. The children have adapted well, settling into local schools such as Oundle Primary School and Polebrook Primary School.

Many community groups sprang into action to help. Initiated by the Oundle Baptist Church, the help for the refugees quickly came from other organisations around town including the Co-op Community Fund and Oundle Town Library. Charities such as Oundle Volunteer Action supplied transport and St Vincent de Paul were also incredibly helpful. Oundle School provided language support, laptops for Ukrainian pupils and access to sport facilities. Even individuals who could not host a family played an important role, such as donating bikes to help refugees travel around.

Carolyn said: "The government information and support was very helpful, but the process was very bureaucratic, there was no clear pathway. We had to work it all out ourselves and having the community stepping in was so crucial, it was amazing"

Iryna, Anna and Illia are two sisters and a son who arrived from Kyiv in September 2022. Having received much support from their host, they are an example of how refugees have successfully

integrated into the community. Both Iryna and Anna have jobs at local restaurants and take weekly online language classes with Northampton College.

Illia (12) arrived with no English, but is now nearly fluent, and attends Prince William School. He said he had not been nervous

participants, with one writing "Thank you so much for everything you have done for us. It means a lot to us. You all have big hearts and we will be friends forever."

Janet explained her mixed feeling about the end of the group. "While it felt very strange last Friday with no meeting, I know that



Iryna, Illia and Anna left Kyiv in September 2022. With support from the local community and their host they have settled into school and jobs

about starting school in England, just curious and excited. With continued drone attacks on Kyiv, they don't know what the future holds.

The work of the community groups and individuals has not gone unappreciated. The end of the support group brought a flood of thankful messages from all the

this is a good sign," she said.

"We started this group with the aim of supporting refugees while they found their feet and to build a community to help them through this time. The fact that this group is coming to an end shows that we have done that, we have founded friendships and links that will live on, so it really is a good sign."



# Music gigs get rave reviews

### Blue Mitra

The Chronicle last spoke with Bob Cheatham a year ago when VicsGigs was getting back in gear after the pandemic shut down tours and gigs. Together with two colleagues, Stevie Jones and Anth Hodson-Curran, they have now got VicsGigs Music Promotions into full swing with events in both Oundle and Peterborough and a growing reputation in the music promoting industry.

The November gig at the Queen Victoria Hall was a sold-out show featuring Talisk on their national tour, with support from Reel Thyme from Corby opening the evening.

New since last year, Bob has collaborated with Stevie to create the Little Ember Sessions, merging VicsGigs and Stevie’s own Wildfire Sessions, “which was essentially music events that did loads of open mics and acoustic showcases”.

They are always on the search for local musicians with an original sound. Bob said: “The Little Ember Sessions focus on getting more local artists involved. The problem is that if you’re a local original artist, there are very limited platforms.”

They have started using the Westgate Suite at The Talbot Hotel for these sessions and have

previously booked local artists such as Jake Cunnington and Matt Carter. “It’s a beautiful sounding, very atmospheric smaller room.”

The Blackheart Orchestra played at a packed Little Ember Session in September and received rave reviews. The music journalist Paul Monkhouse wrote: “The upstairs room of this Northamptonshire hotel has its own magic, the delicate lighting and warmth more welcoming than unsettling. With their ethereal and involving soundscapes, The Blackheart Orchestra were the perfect band for the venue, bringing their own bewitching charm to a night full of blissful and pulse racing highs and lows.”

They are also booking bigger artists that they admire for a programme of near monthly events. Stevie said: “We’re just blokes sitting in a pub fantasizing about concerts that we’d like to put on. Bob is just so good at just picking up the phone and ringing people’s agent and asking, do you want to play here?”

Their perseverance and commitment have paid off and they modestly admit they think they have a good reputation in the industry, now. They were approached by the Key Theatre

in Peterborough to bring music to their venue, and they have booked Pendragon for their only UK appearance on their 2024 European tour. That two-day VIP weekend in May at the Key Theatre is now sold out. Another Key Theatre collaboration is the Soundle Weekend Music Festival in June, featuring two days with ten bands. The events might have left Oundle, but the origins remain in the name.

Back in Oundle, their forthcoming programme includes a December gig with the Outlaw

Eagles at the QVH for an evening of cover tracks from 1971 onwards. On December 10th, a Little Ember Session at The Talbot will feature Chris Fox and The Running Man with a night of contemporary folk, Americana and roots music.

Frank Carducci & The Fantastic Squad will perform in March and the trio McGoldrick, McCusker and Doyle will feature in a Little Embers Session, also in March. For ABBA fans, tickets should be booked well ahead of time for Honey Honey at the QVH in July.



VicsGigs organisers Anth Hodson-Curran, Stevie Jones and Bob Cheatham have expanded their music events with Little Ember Sessions and the Key Theatre.

MUSICAL PERFORMANCES

A RANGE OF GUEST SPEAKERS

EXHIBITIONS AT THE YARROW GALLERY

PERFORMANCES AT THE STAHL THEATRE

A collage of nine small photographs showing various events: a man playing a saxophone, two women in costumes, a man speaking at a podium, a painting, a group of people in costumes, a violinist, a woman in a costume, a man speaking, and an orchestra.

## NEW SCHEDULE OF EVENTS AT OUNDLE SCHOOL COMING SOON

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## EVERYONE IS WELCOME TO ALL EVENTS



# A year on the River Nene

Scarlett Zoll

Kingfishers are undeniably the most flamboyant birds in our area, easily recognisable with their vibrant blue, green and bright orange colouring. Because of their beautiful colours, their feathers were used in the fashion industry to decorate hats, and their popularity threatened the survival of the species. In the 1880s two women launched a campaign to outlaw the feather trade, and it was this campaign that led to the formation of the RSPB.



Photo credit: Nick Penny

Nick has managed to capture many stunning photos of kingfishers.

Their brilliant flashes of colour along the riverbanks also attracted the attention of Nick Penny. Twenty years ago, Nick discovered he had health issues which led him to want to spend time learning about wildlife at an "easy walking distance from his front door".

Over the years, he has spent time every day walking through local fields and woods and along the river. He said that the nightingale song was his way into nature. About twenty years ago he went to the Glapthorn Cow Pasture and started recording their song. He got obsessed with it and would be up all night in spring recording them.

A few years ago, Nick felt that he didn't know much about kingfishers, and so he decided to spend

a year observing and learning about them. He recorded his daily experiences in a journal.

In his new book, *Call of the Kingfisher*, Nick Penny has published his year-long journal of encounters with kingfishers along the River Nene.

Whilst writing his journal, Nick discovered more about the wildlife in the surrounding areas. He became aware of local conservationists such as Lord Lilford who had bird aviaries, and the Rothschilds in Ashton who established the first nature reserve in Wicken Fen.

He also read over one hundred books and recommends *The Natural History of Selborne* by Gilbert White, England's first naturalist. Also, the writings by Sir Peter Scott, the conservationist who went to Oundle School, and Denis Watkins-Pitchford, known as B.B., particularly his book *Summer on the Nene*.

Drawing upon his extensive reading, he describes minute details of Kingfishers. For instance, their beaks are designed to strike the fish they are preying on with minimal splash and sound. They are so well designed that the bullet trains in Japan were engineered to resemble the shape of a kingfisher beak.

The influence and importance of birds in the advancement of civilisation was reinforced after a visit to the Pitts River Museum in Oxford, where exhibits illustrated how bird feathers used for arrows and writing quills provided the tools for hunting, defense and communication.

He said, "People have asked me

Photo credit: Annie Ford



On his walks, Nick uses a parabolic microphone which can pick up sounds over long distances. His book includes links to his audio recordings.

what surprised me about the year. In physical terms, the most surprising thing I saw, because I wasn't expecting it, was a red kite that actually saw a fish from the river. I couldn't believe my own eyes. I think the thing that surprised me the most was just how involved I got with the river. An almost pagan thing. It changed my whole way of looking at wildlife."

Nick combines his love of the natural world with his interests in music. He is an instrument maker and musician, well known in the community for his performances on the Paraguayan harp. In his countryside walks he spent much time recording the sounds of the

natural world, using a parabolic microphone which can pick up sounds over long distances.

Uniquely, these sound recordings are available to readers of his book via a QR code that links to his audio recordings. This enables the reader to feel immersed in the setting of the narrative as they listen to the sounds of animals or birds whilst reading about that particular encounter.

Nick's journal illustrates the importance of the natural world around us and shows us how close it is to our own back door.

*Call of the Kingfisher* is available at the Oundle Bookshop.

\*Front page: Kingfisher by Jasmine Parker

## One of longest running bookshops in the country celebrates its centenary

Ella Younie

In 1923, Stanley Baldwin became prime minister, equal rights in divorce for men and women were established, Wembley Stadium opened, and the BBC was granted a license to broadcast.

It was also the year when the Oundle Bookshop opened at 13 Market Place. The initial purpose of the store was to sell textbooks, stationery, and school prizes for Oundle School pupils, but as it gained popularity, the variety of books expanded.

Books such as *Bambi*, *The Prophet*, and *The Murder on the Links* (Hercule Poirot #2) were first published in 1923 and are still popular and read today.

In 2010, Oundle School leased the bookshop to Colemans, which was already an established

Photo credit: Oundle School Archive



1920s painting of bookshop by Alexander Charles Winter

stationery supply shop, ensuring that the town could retain a bookshop.

There has now been a bookshop in the Market Place for 100 years. It is the oldest established independent bookshop in Northamptonshire. It is also one of the top 10 oldest bookshops in the UK. Hatchards, founded in 1797, is the oldest.

The Oundle Bookshop offers a wide selection of fiction and non-fiction adult and children's books and hosts regular events, including book signings for local authors and open evenings for new book launches. It works closely with the Oundle Festival of Literature which brings author events to Oundle throughout the year.

The building dates to the late 17th century, a period when many medieval buildings were significantly updated or rebuilt. The building originated as a home, but then an ironmonger was opened

on the ground floor in the 1800s by John Jenkins. He turned the business over to his nephew, William Langford Fisher in 1841. Oundle School then acquired the building in 1923.

While many staff have come and gone, two managers' service almost spans the age of the bookshop. Mrs Spencer was the manager of the school bookshop from 1926 until she retired after 34 years in 1960. Karen Burton worked in the bookshop from 1975 for 47 years, until retiring as manager in 2022.

Over the one hundred years, generations of Oundle readers have found inspiration in the shop. Manager Caroline Driver recalled a visit from a small child who stood at the counter and said to his mum, "this is my most favourite place in the whole world".



# Recovery from addiction is Lloyd's story of strength

## Arthur Meynell

Of the myriad eateries and coffee shops in Oundle, Lloyd Ganderton has a penchant for the Greedy Piglet. On a Thursday morning, however, he can be found at No.1 St Osyth's enjoying a sausage roll with friends. Prior to sitting down with Lloyd to talk, his reputation as a flamboyant dresser preceded him. His military dress cuts a distinctive figure around town. His story, as I would soon find out, is one of perseverance and commitment.

Mike Maconochie accompanied Lloyd to our meeting. He is a close friend of Lloyd's from the Baptist Church, and a fellow table tennis player on Wednesday nights. "In spite of his fearsome appearance," Mike tells me, "He is gentle and considerate and respectful, and always on the lookout for somebody that he can help. He is one of the kindest people I've met."

Lloyd never served in the military, but at the Remembrance Day service, an event he attends annually, he wears medals down his right-hand side.

"Well, that goes down to my father bringing me up – he was ex-parachute regiment. He was a driver in the Middle East, in the Suez crisis." Having returned from a decorated career in the forces, John Ganderton, like many veterans, struggled with the transition from military to civilian life, which resulted in a bout of mental illness. Lloyd's pride and devotion to his dad is unflagging. "He was in the 16th Independent Parachute Brigade Group. Quite heroic. Not many kids can say their dad served as a paratrooper."

The Gandertons have lived in the area for some time. His father's family owned a poultry shop on West Street and his father attended Laxton Grammar School. Lloyd attended Prince William School. He describes his time there as being somewhat disruptive but made some enduring friendships which he maintains to this day. "I think I should have joined the forces when I was 16, but other things happened. I had to look after my dad's business, which was the fish and chip shop in Oundle."

Lloyd's father, accustomed to living abroad with the forces, decided to sell his Oundle business and move to Spain. In Benidorm and Alicante, Lloyd and his brother Elliot worked for their dad's car hire company. Mike asks Lloyd if he learnt Spanish during his time there. He grins. "Sí, señor... un poco." In truth, Lloyd can speak the language fluently, occasionally practising with other Spanish-speakers in Oundle.



Thursday morning at No.1 St Osyth is one of Lloyd's routines for coffee and friends; one among the other cafes where he is a popular patron.

When he was eighteen, Lloyd became involved in the rave scene of the eighties, when he was introduced to drugs. After returning from his move to Spain, his former habit developed into an addiction. "I became unwell when I lived in Sheffield for a little while, with a girl that I met in Spain - she was doing her degree out there. I moved back to Sheffield with her and tried to get a business together."

Despite his window-cleaning business showing signs of promise, Lloyd's health declined as his dependency on drugs increased. He eventually found himself in St Mary's Hospital in Kettering, where he came close to dying: "I spent 18 months in intensive care and rehab on and off, in different units. I'm ashamed of it really."

Years of drug abuse left Lloyd with mental health issues that occasionally recur. I asked Lloyd what spurred him to seek help. "Someone said to me one day, 'Look at yourself in the mirror, Lloyd'. So, I looked at myself in the mirror and I said, 'I can see what you actually mean'. Jet black eyes. I didn't feel well. That's when I put myself into care. And for me, I thought eventually I'd kick the habit. At the end of the day, I'm here to tell the story."

With the help of the medical

staff in the wards, Lloyd found the resolve to go cold turkey; something which, he admits stoically, "wasn't very nice".

Lloyd has celebrated twelve years of sobriety. Having ousted drugs and alcohol from his life, his next mission is to quit smoking. "A friend told me that a routine

would keep me on the straight and narrow. If you could do the same thing every day, like an army role, sort of thing. You get up in the morning, get dressed, get out there and do your job. That's what basically what I'm trying to do myself."

He expressed regret for some of the choices he made in his youth. But what really matters is how many times you get back up, not how many times you fall over, and Lloyd has gotten back up. Not everyone has his strength.

Since the death of his father twelve years ago, Lloyd has found solace and community in the local Baptist Church, attending services every Sunday. "They're really nice, sympathetic people. They're like a family to me now."

Voluntary work is the way in which Lloyd finds fulfilment. Before the pandemic, along with other volunteers from the church, Lloyd worked at the Sanctuary Night Shelter cafe in Rushden for the homeless. Mike speaks glowingly about his friend, who would turn up every Monday without fail. "He's always had a big heart for the needy."

Under his watch, cups of tea were rarely empty, and conversation never dull. In his spare time, Lloyd would source unwanted clothing, bring them to the shelter, spread them on a table, free for anyone in need of a few more layers. Mike tells me that before it was shut due to the pandemic, the Night Shelter café was home to the best dressed people in all Northamptonshire. I don't doubt him.

I ask Lloyd how his voluntary work makes him feel. "It makes me feel better, mate. I've given something back to society."

## In recognition of long service with Volunteer Action

Volunteer Action held a well-attended celebration event in September at Barnwell Village Hall. Over 50 volunteers and friends of VA attended, with catering generously donated by the Co-op and Tesco in Oundle.

North Northants County councillors Helen Harrison, Wendy Brackenbury and Geoff Shacklock also attended.

Certificates for long service were awarded, honouring volunteers who have dedicated over fifteen years of volunteering to support the community, alongside five years and Special Appreciation certificates.

Sheena Hill, Mel Lee and Alan Sinfield were applauded for their fifteen years of volunteering. Those who have spent five years

volunteering included John Barratt, Penny Smith, Emma Hanson, Sue Graham and Jane Finlayson. Special recognition certificates were presented to Michael Barnwell, Gill Currie, Jan Jerwood and Anne Plowright

Appreciation was also extended to Stuart Anderson who stepped down as chairman after nine years. The new chairman, David Cashmore was introduced.

Volunteer Action is a local charity supporting local residents who may be elderly, unwell, disadvantaged or have disabilities. By providing services to these valuable members of the community, our aim is to maintain independence and improve the quality of their lives.



## Paint your own pottery studio opens in The Bazaar

**Ruby Allenby**

Pot en Ciel is a new paint-your-own pottery studio, recently opened in Oundle. Occupying the top floor of a former chapel, now called The Bazaar on West Street, the original stained glass and soaring ceiling height make it an inspiring space. "The space is just so beautiful. When I saw it, I couldn't believe it," the owner Agnes Brown said.

Pot en Ciel, meaning pot in the sky, has a double meaning. When pronounced in a French accent, it sounds like the French word for potential, 'potentiel'. Agnes said: "Every single piece has so much potential to become unique, just like we all are so unique and have our potential."

The idea is that there is an opportunity in Oundle to experience fun filled creativity and take a break to connect with oneself. Agnes calls herself a facilitator, not an artist. "I want to create a space where people can come and relax," she said. "We all need to be more creative. It's something we all need and something we're not necessarily encouraged to do."

The studio shelves are stacked



Agnes was first inspired to open a pottery studio twenty years ago when she painted a teapot that she still uses.

with ready-to-paint blank ceramic pieces to choose from, including teapots, vases, plates and ornaments. According to Agnes, she has about one hundred different objects that can be painted. The opportunities are endless. She has a range of thirty paint colours, as well as sponges, silkscreens and stencils for different effects.

The pottery ware is called bisque, when the ceramic has not yet fully reached maturity. After the pieces have been painted, she double-dips them in blue glaze which turns shiny and clear in the firing process. "I love opening the kiln in the morning and seeing the explosion of colour," she said.

The objects that customers work

on range from practical household objects for the kitchen and dinner table to novelty gifts. The medium is breakable, of course, but she encourages people to not feel precious about their work. "It's all a hand-made process, so it's delicate. But I would say, use it, don't save it for the best," Agnes advises.

Pottery painting sessions have been booked for birthday parties, bridal showers, school groups and many events for community groups, from supporting new mums, NHS wellbeing sessions to corporate and team building activities. Tea and coffee are served, cakes are available to buy and champagne glasses are ready for BYOB celebrations. The sessions are focused on adults, not children. There is disabled access, so those with extra mobility needs can enjoy the space.

The studio has received overwhelmingly positive feedback: "People say it's cheaper than therapy. It's cheaper than the Maldives," Agnes said with a smile. "That's the kind of feedback I have had about the effect on people's well-being; of just being here, switching off for a couple of hours."

Two-hour afternoon sessions can be booked via the Pot en Ciel website.



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# Blue Bamboo brings a tropical experience to North Street

## Teddy Flanagan

Blue Bamboo has recently opened in the centre of Oundle, becoming the central site for botanical plants and gifts in the Market Place. With windows crowded with plants, Blue Bamboo provides a vivacious, lively welcome to the heart of Oundle, accompanied by an inviting atmosphere and an unexplainable attraction for those of us that are inspired by life and colour.

Nassington resident Rebecca Miles opened Blue Bamboo because of her love for the building, the former long-term premises of Owen and Hartley. She had always admired the shopfront, and despite initially having no idea what she would put in it, she had her heart set on making it her own.

It was in fact her daughter's idea to turn it into a plant shop. Rebecca recalled, "She said to me, 'Mummy, you have 30 houseplants in your kitchen alone!'" And so, Blue Bamboo was born.

Rebecca doesn't consider herself a botanist, but she's passionate about plants and knew she loved the idea of running a business at 2 North Street. With the shop's generous, curving wall of windows, it was the perfect match.

Blue Bamboo truly emulates the botanical environment. From the first step through the door, you feel fully immersed in a world of life and growth; so much so that I couldn't resist buying two small cacti before leaving!

Rebecca was more than helpful, explaining plant care to me and

reassuring me that I needn't panic and overwater my plants, as many people tend to do.

She recommended to anyone wishing to become a new plant parent that the easiest possible plant to take care of is a ZZ plant (*Zamioculcas zamiifolia*). "It needs very little water. It also survives in very low light conditions."

She also pointed to a spider plant (*Chlorophytum comosum variegatum*), which requires very low maintenance.

There are also trays of small plants for terrariums. They make charming, inexpensive gifts.

According to Rebecca, the key to success with your houseplants is getting two things right - watering and light. "You just have to think about where they are in nature."

She told me that it is a common misconception that houseplants must be watered every day, or that they are "exotic and probably difficult to look after". But in reality, as long as they are being treated as they would be in their natural environment, they are not complicated at all.

She also looks out for collectors who might want something special to add. The shop is an opportunity to browse and add something special or unusual.

*Alocasia Zebrina* is an exotic-looking plant that has dark green leaves with zebra-like patterns on its stems, and is slightly fussy about watering. Air plants suspended from sea urchins are very unusual, but require almost no care.

They've had "loads of support"

from the local community. "Use us or lose us," said Rebecca. "All the independent shops need support." Rebecca pointed out the benefits of using small businesses instead of supermarkets; the plants tend to be healthier, the range of options is far broader, and there is always

all the love they deserve.

Alongside Rebecca's huge collection of plants, her husband's upcycled furniture provides a backdrop for a range of botanical products, candles, vases, ornaments and plant pots. Everything to make a house a home.



Blue Bamboo is filled with plants and wares to make a house a home.

someone to talk to about the plants.

People might worry that houseplants from small shops are all expensive, but Rebecca works hard to keep the costs of the plants down. She makes sure that there is something for anyone who wants to rehome any plants and give them

There is plenty of evidence to support houseplants benefitting mental health. Rebecca said that nurturing plants and watching them grow, unfurling new leaves, is personally fulfilling. "Without your care, they wouldn't have done it."

# There just might be magic to be found in chocolate

## Ella Younie

When the first sign went up in the window announcing the newest shop in the Market Place, Oundle's community Facebook pages lit up. Madam Chocolat had arrived, bringing a proper confectionary shop to Oundle.

Sally Odell used to own a chocolate shop and tearoom in Stamford. After retiring to France with her husband for fourteen years, she returned to the area. "I just wanted something to do. I thought this chocolate shop is the answer," she said.

She brought a bit of France back with her, hence the name Madam Chocolat. She took inspiration from the film *Chocolat*, featuring Johnny Depp, which was based on the novel by Joanne Harris, the story of a woman who opens a chocolaterie and changes the lives of the



Madame Chocolat's shop is a box of confectionary delights, with handmade Belgian chocolates, artisan bars and popular sweets.

villagers who visit her, through sympathy, a little subversion, and some magic.

The small shop in the town center welcomes you with a varied display of handmade Belgian chocolates and specialty bars. Like a chocolate box, the blue doors open to the sweet scent of confectionary.

There is an array of choice, so it is very easy to mix and match, and take home small or large selections, bagged, or boxed, depending on your preference.

The opportunity to buy chocolate is sure to make this shop a success in Oundle. It is scientifically proven that eating chocolate releases serotonin, which is known to be associated with happiness and overall wellness. So, perhaps there really is magic to be found in a sweet chocolate treat.



## A magical night at the Oundle Ball

**Ava Burton**

When Natascha Bankart faced the dilemma of being all dressed up with nowhere to go, she decided to do something about it. And that was how the Oundle Ball was started.

She had recently acquired some evening dresses from a local charity shop but soon realised "there was nowhere to wear them", she tells me. This is when the idea developed. "My parents and some friends were talking in the pub and thought we could just put a ball together. So that's what we did." Natascha could think of no better place to hold it than at the Queen Victoria Hall on West Street.

Following a very successful summer ball held in 2018 and a Christmas ball in 2019, Natascha has received overwhelming encouragement to organise another one. She tells me "We kept having people come up to us ask, did you do the charity ball, we loved it so much can you do another. So, we're like, well sure."



Natascha and her team lavish an enormous amount of time and imagination on the preparation for the ball to create a magical, memorable event.

She decided that a spring ball would be more suitable and has set a date for 20th April 2024 in the Victoria Hall. The proceeds from the ball will raise money for both the Leprosy Mission and the British Red Cross.

The evening will include a welcome drink and catering by Stanley Street, a company based in Barnwell that can be found in town on market days. There will be a cash bar. The Fortissimo swing band will return, as well.

It sounds like the preparation was just as much fun as the actual ball. Decorations were carefully thought about for each of the

previous balls and a lot of work was clearly put in to create such a magical event.

The Barn Garden Centre in Barnwell also helped by donating plants to decorate the space.

"People got together and just did crafts on a Saturday. The hall was covered. We look back and wonder how we did it!"

She invites anyone who would like to help decorate to join in. "One year we had wisteria decorations and the next year we made over one thousand snowflakes!"

The ball is a community event, but has a personal touch, thanks to her family. "Usually we have a gift that everyone can take home at the end," she said.

"The first year we made a massive tile wall and everyone took a tile. The next year everyone got a little Christmas decoration. This year, we have to keep up the tradition, so everyone will have a memento to take home with them. We like making things! My mum does pottery so basically, it's

her pottery. We just like, sort of, blessing people."

Aside from the opportunity to raise funds for important causes, "We just want to have fun."

"I think it speaks for itself that people have been asking for it to happen again. Everyone had a good time. There's one story where our neighbour met someone else who had gone to school with them."

But to go back to the beginning, Natascha reminds me: "The main reason for organising the ball is a chance to dress up. If you like dressing up, come along!"

Tickets can be booked at: [nataschabankart.com/charity-ball](http://nataschabankart.com/charity-ball)

## A convergence of art and science at the Yarrow Gallery engages school pupils

**Felix Hwangbo**

At an exhibition at the Yarrow Gallery and at Oundle's SciTec in November, hundreds of local school pupils met the internationally recognised artist, Anna Dumitriu at her show BioArt: Knowledge.

Science and art. Supposedly two very contrasting subjects that seem to lack any connection. However, a bond between the two has been in existence for over centuries, with artists able to give a better understanding of science through their observation of detail and skill. In recent years, a new form of art has emerged, BioArt, where artists work with biology such as live tissues and bacteria and create artworks using microscopy and biotechnology.



Photo: Ivan Quetglas

Anna Dumitriu led art workshops for hundreds of pupils in local schools.

Anna Dumitriu's work explores our relationship with science and biomedicine at a time when we face rapid changes. As an artist she is absorbed by the history of infectious diseases, medical ethics, antibiotics, and cell biology. She speaks urgently to the concerns of wide audiences and creates an emotionally affecting experience that addresses issues of both global and local relevance, important to everyone.

Anna has exhibited her work internationally, including Europe, Asia and the US and she collaborates with an impressive number of scientific bodies, medical institutions and universities. These relationships have allowed her to devise artistic manifestations of scientific history and development.

But if art is not presented as a literal idea, it can be difficult to understand. And the idea that art can be fused with the sciences can convince young viewers that art is even more complex. Meeting the artist at the exhibition at the Yarrow and learning first-hand about her work was an enlightening experience for pupils who came from area schools across all the age ranges. They attended talks, tours, and art and science workshops led by Anna and by Imperial College outreach Fellows that explored her collaborations and artistic process.

"All the work is made hands-on in the lab as much as it is in the

studio. I try to do my works on all the sciences as much as possible, to learn and understand so I can communicate it in the works," she said.

Amongst her work in the Yarrow was one piece that took centre stage: Plague Dress, made in the style of a 17th century dress from raw silk hand-dyed with walnut husks and stuffed and surrounded by lavender, which was carried by people to cover the stench of infection and prevent disease, which was believed to be caused by bad air. The walnut dye derives from the writings of the herbalist Nicholas Culpeper, who recommended walnuts as a treatment for the plague.

The dress itself is symbolic of the cloth workers who handled the imported fine silks and linen that were infected with disease carrying fleas. Dumitriu used original 17th century embroidery on the dress bodice, which she impregnated with the DNA of the *Yersinia Pestis* bacteria, which she extracted from killed bacteria in the laboratory of the National Collection of Type Cultures at the UK Health Security Agency. The Plague Dress presents the viewers with a message about the trauma of infectious disease historically, and its impact on current public health strategies.



Closely connected to the Plague Dress was Dumitriu's Zenexon, an amulet to protect the wearer from the plague. Historically, the amulet might contain a paste of powdered toads, menstrual blood from a virgin collected on a full moon or sapphires that would turn black when they sensed the plague.

But unlike the amulets of that era, this contemporary Zenexon contains something that would genuinely protect the wearer: a vial of vaccine against the *Yersinia Pestis* bacteria, which causes plague, recently developed by scientists at the University of Oxford using the ChAdOx1 platform. Textured like the skin of a toad and studded with machine-made sapphires, the amulet's design symbolises how far treatment of disease has advanced thanks to the evolution of modern science and technology.



# For travel advice, consult the specialists

**Sophie Lam**

One of Oundle’s newest businesses in the Market Place is Savvi Travel, a local regional agency known for making tailored holidays. Run by Kay and Dave Batley, Savvi is a family business. They started it up in their back bedroom in 2011, and now have four high street shops in Oakham, Olney, Hitchin and the recently opened one in Oundle.

“We both have a love for travel,

and we felt that the High Street didn’t offer what we were trying to do. We felt that we could do things better.”

Dave has travelled to more than 30 countries, and he regularly sends the staff on training trips around the world. When I spoke to him, he had just returned from trips to Dubai and Italy.

There are many online booking agencies for flights and hotels that may appear to be a cheap

option. But Dave warns that these platforms could be a false economy. “If something goes wrong with that holiday, how do you get hold of them? You can spend lots of time on the phone, lots of time emailing,” Dave said. The disruption caused by Covid is an example of why using a travel agent offers invaluable benefits.

“Instead, you just come in here,

A travel agent like Savvi Travel, can offer travel assistance and customised service. Because of their well-established relationships across the industry, Savvi Travel is a preferred partner with operators, tour organisers and airlines and can share the best options and get the best deals.

They do not offer travel insurance or arrange visas, but



Photos: Savvi Travel



see us, and we do everything for you. We offer a full concierge type service. We have no allegiance to any operator or airline, we try to offer the best holiday that the client is after.”

In recent months, Savvi Travel has sent clients on cruises, villa holidays and trips to Australia, Asia, and America. Dave said, “We can do anything, from a city break to something out of the ordinary. I’ll give you one that’s quite out there: a polar bear expedition, costing up to £8500.”



can refer travellers to trusted companies and sites to make arrangements.

Using a travel agent provides face-to-face communication and builds strong relationship between the clients and the agent that gives peace of mind for a trouble-free travelling experience.

Dave said: “I do think we make the difference with our independent knowledge. It’s all about the customer service and the customer experience.”

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Oundle School  
**SPORTS CENTRE**



# Winter street style in Oundle

by Scarlett Zoll



Lucas is wearing a black Stüssy jacket, black jeans, Adidas trainers and a green hoodie. His fashion style is about what he is drawn to in the moment.



Julia is wearing a monogrammed Burberry coat she bought fifty years ago, leather boots, a felt hat, and a dress from Seasalt. Her bag is from Mulberry.



Mima is wearing a red knitted polo neck, Motel Rocks jeans and a sea glass necklace. Her favourite item is her brown leather jacket, which she bought in a vintage market in Amsterdam in October.



Yuki is wearing a green checked coat and turquoise jumper, both from Paul Smith, which he pairs with Levi's. Yuki had been in Oundle working as a translator at Lilford Hall for the month.



Bundled up on a cold morning, Suzanne is wearing a long, wool trench coat that she got from Zara several years ago and wears all the time, as well as a favorite Primark dress, spotty gloves and a grey wool hat.



Sharon is wearing a black fur coat accessorised with a brooch, both of which were found in a charity shop. She replaced the coat buttons with ones bought at Little Blue in Oundle. By her side is her VW campervan.